

Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services (LEV)

Getting Started



Why Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services?

Law enforcement-based victim services personnel are dedicated to serving victims of crime.¹ They ensure victims' needs² are identified, voices are heard, and rights are afforded. They are the only law enforcement staff whose primary responsibility is to serve victims. Building a strong victim services program can improve your agency's overall response to victims and enhance community trust.

Law enforcement agencies can establish victim services programs by:



Step 1: Identifying Key Players

Establish an implementation team. Ideally, this team would consist of:

-  **Champion:** someone who believes in the value of law enforcement-based victim services
-  **Action-Taker:** someone with the time and authority to make programmatic decisions
-  **Subject Matter Expert:** someone with a background in victim services

Seek guidance outside of your department from community-based victim services agencies. They can assist with program development and hiring.



Step 2: Getting a Lay of the Land

Complete a needs assessment to:

-  **Identify what victim services currently exist in your community.** This may include other law enforcement agencies, district attorney's offices, community-based organizations, universities, and hospitals. It is important to know where these programs are located and who they serve.
-  **Analyze agency data related to crime type and location.** This will help you make informed decisions around staff capacity, services, and funding opportunities.

1. For the purposes of this document, "law enforcement-based victim services" refers to victim services personnel who are employed by a law enforcement agency. For additional information on models of victim services provision, see [LEV Quick Reference - Victim Services Role](#).
2. For additional information on Seven Critical Needs of Victims, see [Training Bulletin - Critical Needs of Victims](#).



Step 3: Making Key Decisions

Service Parameters

Based on the assessment, determine to whom and how services will be provided:

-  **Population Served:** Will services be provided to adult or minor victims? Will services be provided for specific crime types (e.g., violent crime, property crime)?
-  **Victim Services Response:** Will victim services personnel interact with victims in the office, field (e.g., hospital, victims' residence), or on-scene?
-  **Communication:** Will communication with victims take place in person; by phone, text, email; or through mailed letters?
-  **Accessibility:** How will victims with limited English proficiency access services? What accommodations will be made for victims with mental health, cognitive, and physical access needs?

Organizational Structure & Supervision

Decide where victim services will be placed on the organizational chart and whom victim services personnel will report to.

-  **Organization Chart:** Consider placement of victim services in different divisions of your department (e.g., investigations, administrative command, patrol).
-  **Supervisor:** Consider placing a professional staff employee with victim services experience as the victim services supervisor. Ensure the supervisor has the authority to make programmatic decisions.



Step 4: Solidifying Policies

Create policies specifically for victim services. This will promote role clarity and consistent, ethical practice.³

Identify federal, state, and tribal statutes, rulings, and agency policies that might impact victim services, including those that relate to:

-  Victims' rights
-  Access to records
-  Information sharing
-  Documentation

3. For sample victim services policies and protocols see [LEV - Template Package I: Getting Started](#) and [LEV - Template Package II: Next Steps](#)



Step 5: Hiring, Training, and Launching Victim Services

Identify the skills needed for the position (e.g., frontline advocate, victim services program manager). Strategically recruit qualified candidates and use community partners to assist with panel interviews.

Develop a thorough on-boarding program for new staff to ensure understanding of the agency and victim services role.⁴

Establish cross-training with victim services and other sworn and professional staff. This will ensure everyone understands the victim services role.

To spread the word about victim services, consider:

- Participating in roll call trainings and unit meetings
- Meeting with community partners
- Attending community events
- Sending out social media announcements and press releases

4. For a sample onboarding checklist see [LEV - Template Package I: Getting Started](#).

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